

REMARKS OF SENATOR RICHARD J. DURBIN  
AT THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON CONSUMER AFFAIRS,  
FOREIGN COMMERCE AND TOURISM HEARING ON  
MAD COW DISEASE  
APRIL 4, 2001

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the opportunity to speak here this morning.

Mad cow disease -- more properly known as BSE -- has grabbed the attention of the whole world. We've all seen the awful scenes in Europe. Video clips of trembling cows, barely able to move, or even feed themselves. Images of teenagers wasting away from a mysterious illness linked to eating beef. Pictures of millions of head of cattle destroyed, in hopes of stopping the spread of a terrible disease.

My message here today – my reminder to the American people – is that these are *European* scenes. Europe is afflicted with BSE. We are not. Europe is suffering from foot and mouth disease. We are not. Europe has cases of vCJD – the human illness related to BSE. We do not.

The United States has long had the safest food supply in world. We owe this to the expertise of our farmers and to the safety-consciousness of the food industry. We owe it, as well, to having the world's best system of regulation and oversight for food safety.

Foot and mouth was eradicated in the U.S. in 1929 and has not been seen since. BSE was first identified in Britain in 1986.

Fifteen years later, neither the animal nor the human version of this disease has ever occurred in the U.S. Our vigilance has paid off, and will continue to provide us an unparalleled degree of protection.

At the same time, we need to acknowledge how dramatically the food system has changed. The globalization of commerce has affected our food supply as radically as any other commodity.

Automobiles or clothes or computers purchased here in the U.S. are put together with components from all over the world. So are our food products.

We've become so used to buying fresh grapes in the middle of winter, that it's easy to forget those grapes may have crossed thousands of miles -- and several national borders -- before coming to rest on the supermarket shelves. Animals are shipped world-wide, as are animal products and animal feeds.

As the complexity of international trade in food and feed products has multiplied, so too, have the demands on our food safety system. Federal agencies have not always responded as fully as they might.

Last year, in response to my request, the General Accounting Office reported widespread non-compliance with many of the measures put in place to protect our country from BSE. Non-compliance rates as high as 28% were reported in some segments of the industry, with virtually no enforcement response from FDA. Although the compliance picture has improved somewhat, there is need for additional safety measures.

For that reason, I will soon be introducing THE NATIONAL FOOD SECURITY AND SAFETY ACT to better fortify our nation's defenses against the introduction of BSE and related animal diseases.

This legislation will strengthen our three primary firewalls against BSE.

#### ONE: NATIONAL BORDERS

The National Food Security and Safety Act will update information requirements on imported foods and feeds so that federal agents at the border will not have to play a guessing game as to whether a product does or does not contain meat, and if it does, whether that meat is from a cow or from a country where BSE is known to occur.

This information, which is not currently required, limits the ability of inspectors at the border to keep out unsafe foods. Governor Perry of Texas has called for intensified inspections at our borders to insure the safety of our livestock and food supply. More than three billion pounds of meat products enter our country every year. The provisions in my bill will allow for much more focused and effective inspections of these imports.

## TWO: PROTECTING FOOD AND FEED SUPPLIES

BSE and similar diseases are known to concentrate in the central nervous system of ruminant animals such as cows or sheep. So why do we continue to feed these tissues to animals, or for that matter, to people? My bill eliminates ruminant nerve tissue from both the human food and animal feed supply. It also prohibits the use of material from *any* animal with symptoms of a neurological disease.

I am also proposing to expand the current feed ban so that, at the very least, ruminant animals are not eating feed that contains any material – blood, bone, fat – *anything* from other ruminants. The bill would put in place a certification program that makes use of the best-in-class certification programs already in place.

I am also evaluating a further extension of the feed ban so that ruminant feed does not contain any animal-derived materials.

### THREE: SURVEILLANCE

My bill calls for the creation of a national task force to report back to Congress on priorities for conducting the best possible surveillance program for detecting BSE and related diseases, as a means of further insuring that these diseases are not present in the U.S. in either livestock or in humans.

### NON-FOOD PRODUCTS



In addition to better protecting the food supply, we need to remember that animal products are used in many non-food items, including supplements, cosmetics, and medicines. For instance, pharmaceutical companies sometimes use blood or fetal calf material in the production of vaccines. My bill would make mandatory several strategies that are widely recognized to provide an appropriate measure of safety, but are not always practiced.

## SCIENCE

Central to our food safety system has been the application of the best scientific information available to industry and to federal agencies. Science has been the best, most trustworthy guide to keeping our food supply safe. The National Food Security and Safety Act empowers agencies to make changes or exemptions to the bill's requirements when such an action is justified by sound science.

By updating and expanding our food safety system, the U.S. food supply will continue to be the safest in the world.